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AUTHOR Turner, Castellano B.; Turner, Barbara F.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to relate perceptions of occupational discrimination to the actual occupational opportunity structure in American society. The latter refers to the relative openness of various occupations to individuals possessing certain characteristics that are, in fact, differentially distributed among occupations. Both cohorts of students completed questionnaires that included 2 scales of 21 occupations seeking ratings of occupational discrimination against women and African Americans. The sample was comprised of 128 men and 213 women, a part of an entering class at a large state university in the northeast (the same university but another campus was used in a 1969 study). Seventy-four percent of the students were non-Latino whites. It was concluded that: (1) correspondence between the perceived and actual opportunity structure has not changed over time; each of the race-sex groups' ratings were significantly related to the census data; and (2) the relative accuracy of the four race-sex groups has changed somewhat. White females' ratings, which yielded the lowest correlations with the census data in the earlier cohort, improved the most. These conclusions suggest that the racial and gender structure of high status occupations has an accurate representation in the perception of these two cohorts of students, and that there has been only modest change in accuracy over time. (JBJ)

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RACE AND SEX DISCRIMINATION IN OCCUPATIONS: A 20-YEAR REPLICATION

Castellano B. Turner and Barbara F. Turner

University of Massachusetts Boston

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Race and Gender Discrimination in Occupations: A 20-year Replication

Castellano B. Turner and Barbara F. Turner

University of Massachusetts Boston

The purpose of this research was to relate perceptions of occupational discrimination to the actual occupational opportunity structure in American society. The latter refers to the relative openness of various occupations to individuals possessing certain characteristics that are, in fact, differentially distributed among occupations.

Longstanding and recent evidence suggests that discrimination is an important contributor to existing racial and gender distributions in occupations in the United States. Ethnic minorities and women are discriminated against in gaining access to and advancement in prestigious white-male dominated occupations (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Bergmann, 1986; Turner & Turner 1981) and jobs (Bielby & Baron, 1986; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993), and those who do gain access experience discrimination in advancement and pay (Bergmann, 1984; Thomas & Alderfer, 1989; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993).

We have earlier reported (Turner & Turner, 1981, 1984), based on the 1970 census and ratings gathered in 1969, a close correspondence between discrimination ratings and actual representation in 21 occupations. Two possible implications followed: first, the intractable nature of distortions in the occupational structure could be partially explained by the norms and expectations held generally in society; but second, movement toward an equitable society depended upon changes in the actual

structure of occupations.

Between the 1970 and 1990 censuses there were substantial increases in the representation of African Americans and women in some high status occupations (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). By repeating the study we conducted in 1969 we hoped to answer two questions. First, has the correspondence between the perceived and the actual structure of occupations changed between the 1970 and 1990 censuses? Second, has the relative accuracy of the race-sex groups in representing the actual structure been consistent over twenty years?

Method

Sample. The original sample (1969) comprised the entering class at a large state University in the Northeast. The new sample (1992) was comprised of entering students at another campus of the same state university. There were 128 men and 213 women. Seventy-four percent were non-Latino whites. Both samples were studied as part of the new student orientation in the summer prior to entry into the university.

Procedure. Both cohorts of students completed questionnaires that included two scales of 21 occupations seeking ratings of occupational discrimination against women and against African Americans. The question on women was:

> Here are some questions about discrimination in employment and advancement in some occupations...Do you think this field is open to women: (1) on the same basis as to men, (2) open only to exceptional women, (3) open to women only on a segregated basis, (4) not open to

women?

The introduction to the scale of occupational discrimination against African Americans was worded similarly:

> ...Do you think this field is open to African Americans: (1) on the same basis as to Whites, (2) open only to exceptional African Americans, (3) open to African Americans only on a segregated basis, (4) not open to African Americans?

The 21 occupations in these scales are mostly high-status white-collar, managerial, and professional occupations appropriate to the career plans of college students. In most of these high-status occupations, African Americans and women continue to be underrepresented.

In the absence of discrimination and inequities in occupational achievement, one would expect any subgroup to be in each occupation in approximate proportion to its representation in the population as a whole. Any deviation from the overall representation of African Americans or women can be viewed, therefore, as over- or underrepresentation. The percentage of African Americans and women in the 21 occupations was used as the putative measure of occupational discrimination.

Results

Table 1 presents four sets of correlations between ratings and census representation of blacks and women. The columns headed 1970 are correlations between the mean ratings of the four race-sex groups in 1969 and the black and female percentages from the 1970 census. These correlations were previously reported and are

presented here only for comparison. The columns headed 1990 are correlations between the mean ratings of the four groups in 1992 and the black and female percentages from the 1990 census.

The overall pattern for the two cohorts is remarkably similar. All the correlations reached statistical significance for both cohorts. For both cohorts we had hypothesized that the two black groups' ratings of racial discrimination would show larger correlations than would those of the two white groups. Although this hypothesis was supported in the earlier cohort, the white female ratings yielded the largest correlation in the later cohort.

For the earlier cohort our previous research had led us to expect the largest correlation between the black female ratings of discrimination against women and the census. That expectation was supported, and white female ratings yielded a significantly smaller correlation. In the later cohort, however, all of the groups not only yield large correlations, but these correlations were very similar.

We conclude: First, the correspondence between the perceived and the actual opportunity structure has not changed over time; each of the race-sex groups' ratings were significantly related to the census data. Second, the relative accuracy of the four race-sex groups has changed somewhat. White females' ratings, which yielded the lowest correlations with the census data in the earlier cohort, improved the most.

Discussion

The findings suggest: first, that the racial and gender structure of high status occupations has an accurate representation

in the perception of these two cohorts of students; and second, that there has been only modest change in accuracy over time.

The theory we use to interpret these findings posits a cognitive representation of social structural arrangements. Through a variety of devices members of a culture incorporate a schema of relative position of categories of people. In spite of some improvements in the openness of occupations, the basic structure is difficult to modify over a period as brief as twenty years. The circular nature of the relationship between cognitive schemas and structural arrangements will lead to a slower process of changes than might be predicted. Reason for some optimism will be found both in rising expectations and in the increasing openness of occupational opportunity.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Relating Perceived Race and Gender Discrimination with Actual Representation of Blacks and Women in Occupations for Four Race-Gender Groups

Group Rating	Black Percent U.S. Census		Women Percent U.S. Census	
	1970	1990	1970	1990
Black Males	.64**	.50*	.83***	.77***
Black Females	.63**	.42*	.85***	.83***
White Males	.49*	.37*	.78***	.79***
White Females	.48*	.60**	.65**	.75***

*P < .05

** < .01

*** < .001

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